

ernment officials to rampant smuggling. The final thematic chapter explores the complex relationship of free and enslaved people of colour to the system of smuggling. Enslaved Africans participated in the system as both smugglers and smuggled. Meanwhile, Cromwell argues, free people of colour captured in the act of smuggling endured the added risk of potential enslavement.

On its own, Cromwell's chapter on people of colour is informative, but it also best illustrates the organizational difficulties of *The Smugglers' World*. Cromwell's thematic approach dissects and compartmentalizes Venezuela's system of smuggling. As a maritime historian, I was particularly interested in learning about the lives of smugglers at sea and the ships they sailed. Chapter Four left me unsatisfied, in part, because some stories and aspects of the maritime world had been torn out and placed in other chapters. For instance, people of colour, both enslaved and free, had important roles on board smuggling vessels, especially enslaved seafarers hired out by their owners. These seafarers had no choice in their employment and, therefore, served an important role in filling out smuggler crews. To gain a complete understanding of "Foreign Smugglers" and their crews, this needed to be included Chapter Four. The chapter also disappointed by lacking specific stories about individual seafaring smugglers. Chapter Six, however, had the excellent story of John White or "Juan Blanco," a captured Irish smuggler, which could have provided a human face to foreign seafarers (206-207).

This organizational critique can be extended to other themes and chapters. For example, in Chapter Six, we learn the fascinating story of Governor García de la Torre, who developed a web of friendships and obligations among

smugglers due to his leniency. He regularly pardoned smugglers or overlooked their activities. In return, he garnered respect from many Venezuelan's who enjoyed increased access to European goods, alcohol, and food. De la Torre's activities proved critical to the creation of the Caracas Company and it led to his removal from office and incarceration. In many ways, De la Torre's story fit better in Cromwell's analysis of the Caracas Company in Chapter Three, but we don't learn about it until a little over a hundred pages later. As historians, we often make difficult organizational decisions with material. Cromwell's decisions, at times, hurt the narrative flow through disjointed chronologies, impeded analysis of important topics like maritime workers and the development of the Caracas Company, and created some unnecessary redundancies.

The Smugglers' World is a well-researched, informed, and academically inclined study. Talented smugglers endeavoured to remain hidden from the historical record, but Cromwell has admirably discovered their networks, both at sea and on land, and told their stories.

Organizational issues aside, Cromwell's argument placing smugglers and smuggling at the center of Venezuelan society is an important contribution to our understanding of colonial Venezuela and its place in the Atlantic world.

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J. Ross Dancy. *The Myth of the Press Gang: Volunteers, Impressment and the Naval Manpower Problem in the Late Eighteenth Century*. Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, www.boydellandbrewer.com, 2018. (First published 2015). xiv+213 pp., illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. US \$24.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-78327-289-1.

Who in their right mind, we moderns incredulously ask, would have voluntarily joined the eighteenth-century British navy? Thanks to lurid stories, paintings, prints, poems, Winston Churchill's famous quote about "rum, sodomy, and the lash," and Hollywood (recall Captain Bligh), we can only assume none but a fool. Hence, the outsized reputation of the press gang, a roving band of hard-bitten sailors led by a junior officer to the staccato beat of a snare drum. This ruthless squad approached civilian men and compelled them to take the king's shilling, by force, if necessary. Honest labourers were kidnapped from job sites, husbands ripped from pleading wives, drunkards yanked from taverns, and all carried off to the looming silhouette of a seventy-four mid-river. Historians have perpetuated this dramatic scenario, arguing that pressed men comprised between 50 and 75 percent of the British Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars.

Enter J. Ross Dancy, director of graduate studies in history and assistant professor of history at Sam Houston State University, who convincingly explodes this assumption in his remarkable study *The Myth of the Press Gang*. Dancy is the first scholar to apply cliometrics (a term inspired by the Muse of history indicating mathematical and statistical analysis of the past) to a study of press gangs, and the results are eye-opening. Happily, as a Marine Corps veteran with extensive sea service, Dancy also brings a personal dimension to his work that both enlivens and deepens it. Not for him the officer class, but rather the men of the lower deck, who "captured my interest most." (xii)

Dancy's research rests on Royal Navy ships' muster books kept between 1793 and 1801. These extraordinary records include men's ages, dates of

entry, ratings, forms of recruitment, birthplaces, and discharge dates. In order to manageably handle this material, Dancy selected ships commissioned and manned at the ports of Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth, "three ships from each port in each year," for a total of 81 vessels "over the nine years of the sample." (5) They include ships-of-the-line like the *Minotaur* (74 guns) and *Leviathan* (80 guns), frigates like the *Janus* (32 guns) and the *Seahorse* (38 guns), and sloops like the *Pheasant* (16 guns) and the *Raileur* (14 guns). Dancy then crunched his numbers for 22 weeks to obtain a database of 27,174 men, roughly 10 percent of the navy's manpower recruited during the period.

Cliometrics means figures and tables, and *The Myth of the Press Gang* has these in abundance. There are pie charts on seaman recruitment, bar graphs on pressed men's ratings, and tables on volunteer nationality, to pluck only three examples. Similarly, the text is seeded with more statistics than an American political poll. All of this leads to some remarkable conclusions. "Press gangs were not the brutal force that has generally been written about," Dancy writes. In fact, statistics show that between 1738 and 1805, a broad time-frame to be sure, 602 "affrays" (140) were noted. That averages one scuffle for every 750 men pressed, a figure that hardly fits the popular image.

Dancy carefully examines the British navy's manpower problems, exacerbated by competition with merchant vessels for skilled seamen. Britain had tens of thousands of men schooled before the mast, but not enough to fully crew both a wartime navy and a functional merchant marine. Press gangs were expected to make up the difference, but when they took to the cobblestoned byways, it was in search of experienced mariners rather than innocent

farmers or barkeeps.

Surprisingly, Dancy demonstrates that, press gangs aside, the navy always had volunteers. To begin with, life on land was difficult, and the navy offered recruitment bonuses, camaraderie (too often underestimated by historians, the veteran Dancy declares), advancement, regular meals, a rum ration, a structured work routine, and prize money shares. Sadistic officers were the exception. “Tyranical officers did not rule sailors of the Royal Navy,” Dancy writes, “and those that did exist in naval service were often not promoted to command. The men of the lower deck disliked officers who treated them poorly, and the fact that well-known and successful officers were highly respected by their men goes to show the difference in efficiency between a happy and a miserable crew.” (100) So how many men were pressed? By Dancy’s calculations, it was only one in five. The rest were motivated young volunteers.

The Myth of the Press Gang is best digested in small doses. It is certainly not a beach read, but for sheer power of statistical persuasion, it represents one of the most impressive maritime history arguments in years. Hopefully, other researchers will consider Dancy’s methods and apply them to different historical problems. The possibilities are endless.

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Aidan Dodson and Serena Cant. *Spoils of War: The Fate of Enemy Fleets after Two World Wars*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Seaforth Publishing, www.seaforthpublishing.com, 2020. 328 pp., illustrations, tables, appendices, bibliography. UK £35.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-5267-4198-1. (E-book and Kindle editions available.)

The fate of the warships of the defeated nations of the First and Second World Wars is perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of modern naval history, as their destinies rarely receive more than an afterthought. It is an abyss that this book attempts to cover. Author Aidan Dodson needs little introduction, as several of his works have already been published by Seaforth. Although not a professional naval historian, he has established an excellent reputation—especially on the First World War era. His co-author, Serena Cant, is well known as a specialist in shipwreck documentation for the early twentieth century and has previously published works in this field. This volume finds both of them boldly straying from their previous eras of expertise to the Second World War.

This work is divided into two major parts, fittingly devoted to each of the world wars, and it is generously illustrated with well-chosen photographs. Part I is presented in three sections, while Part II is broken down into five sections. Each part is presented in three distinct segments, i.e. *Endgame*, *Under New Management* and *Appendices*. These are buttressed by a brief preface, an even more concise introduction and supplemented by a very short concluding essay entitled *Retrospect* in Section 9. The appendices are conveniently located in three locations. The first is presented before Part I, in the form of a helpful Table of Conventions and Abbreviations, while the others are to be found at the end of each Part. While this is unorthodox, it is effective, because it places the various tables and appendices closer to their subject periods. Nonetheless, one wonders if the book was originally planned as a two-volume set.

The *Endgame* chapter in Part I details the road to the defeat of the Cen-